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ROOSHKULUM, OR THE WISE SIMPLETON,
A LEGEND OF CLARE.

BY J. G. M'TEAGUE.

CORNEY NEYLAN, our village schoolmaster, when any question of arithmetic may be proposed to him which he is in no humour to answer, and would rather turn off by a joke, has been frequently known to reply to it by asking another question, like this:—

"Now, boys, ye're striving to puzzle me; and I'll engage none of ye can answer something that I'll ask ye, now."

"What is it, Corney? Let's hear it!"

"How many grains of oatmeal are contained in one given square foot of stirabout?"

This is, in its turn, a poser; but probably the number of schemes, tricks, and contrivances, in an Irish cranium, might be found as hard to be enumerated as the grains of meal in the aforesaid foot of stirabout!

Thus, while around the blazing turf fire, on a winter's evening, the story, the pipe, and the joke, take their rounds by turn, you will invariably discover that that tale always gains a double share of applause which may contain a relation of some clever successful scheme or trick, or the "sayings and doings" of some remarkably clever fellow, albeit perhaps a great rogue; in fact, such stories as these are suited to the conceptions and tastes of a shrewd and ready-witted people.

But without tiring my reader with any more "shanachus," for so we term "palaver" in Clare, let me endeavour to present him with one of these very stories, which, if it boasteth not of much interest, may perhaps amuse him by its originality. Honour to that man, whomsoever he may be, who first rescued these curious legends from oblivion, and found in our Irish Penny Journal an excellent repository for their safer preservation!

The reader must not be surprised if my story contains a slight dash of the marvellous, probably bordering on the hyperbolical; but this, which I verily believe is but a kind of ornament, something superadded by the genius of the narrators, as it has descended, must be taken as it is meant, and will in most instances be found capable of translation, as it were, into language easily and naturally to be explained.

A very long time ago, then, somewhere in the western part of the province of Munster, lived, in a small and wretched cabin, a poor widow, named Moireen Mera. She had three sons, two of whom were fine young men; but the third—and of him we shall soon hear a good deal—though strong and active, was of a lazy disposition, which resulted, as his mother at least always thought, not so much from any fault of his own, as from his natural foolishness of character; in fact, she really considered him as of that class called in Ireland "naturals." But before we say anything of the third son, let us trace the histories of his two elder brothers.

Now, the first, whose name was Mihal More, or Michael Big Fellow, either that he considered the small spot of land which his mother held quite unable to support the family, or was actuated by some desire to improve his condition away from home, never let his mother rest one moment until she had consented to his starting, in order that he might, as he said, should he fall in with a good master, return, and perhaps make her comfortable for the remainder of her days.

To this plan, after much hesitation, Moireen Mera at length agreed, and the day was fixed by Mihal for starting. "And, mother," said he, "though you have but little left, and it is wrong to deprive you of it, if you *would* but bake me a fine cake of wheaten bread, and if you *could* but spare me one of the hens—ah! that would be too much to ask!—against the long road; could you, mother?"

"Why not, Michael? I could never refuse you any thing; and you will want the cake and the hen badly enough. And, Mihal, a vick asthore! if you should ever meet one of the good people, or any thing you may think *isn't* right, pass it by, and say not a word."

It was evening when he began his expedition, nor did he stop on the road till daylight returned, when he found himself in the centre of a wood, and very faint and hungry. Seeing a convenient-looking rock near a place where he thought it most probable he should find water, he seated himself, with the intention of satisfying his hunger and thirst.

He had not been many moments engaged in eating some of his bread, and had just commenced an attack on the hen, by taking off one of her wings, when there came up to him a poor greyhound, which looked the very picture of starvation.

Greyhounds are proverbially thin, but this was thinner than the thinnest, and, it was easy to see, had doubtlessly left at home a numerous young family.

Mihal More was so very intent on eating that he heeded not the imploring look of the poor greyhound, and it was not till, wonderful to say, she addressed him in *intelligible Irish*, that he deigned to notice her. But when the first word came from her mouth, he was sure she must be one of those against any communication with whom his mother had so emphatically warned him, and accordingly determined to apply her maxim strictly to the occurrence.

"You are a traveller, I see," said the greyhound, "and were doubtless weary and fainting with hunger when you took your seat here. I am the mother of a numerous and helpless family, who are even now clamorous for subsistence; this I am unable to afford them, unless I am myself supported. You have now the means. Afford it to me, then, if only in the shape of a few of the hen's small bones; I will be for ever grateful, and may perhaps be the means of serving you in turn when you may most want and least expect it."

But Mihal continued sedulously picking the bones, and when he had finished, he put them all back into his wallet, still resolving to have nothing whatever to do with this fairy, represented, as he imagined, by the greyhound.

"Well!" said she, piteously, "since you give me nothing, follow me. You are perhaps in search of service; my master, who knows not my faculty of speech, lives near; he may assist you. And see," continued she, as he followed, "behold that well. Had you relieved me, it was in my power to have changed its contents, which are of *blood*, to the finest virgin honey; but the honey is beneath the blood, neither can it now be changed! However, try your fortune, and if you are a reasonably sensible fellow, I may yet relent, and be reconciled to you."

Mihal still answered not a word, but followed the greyhound, until she came to the gate of a comfortable farmer's residence. She entered the door, and Mihal saw her occupy her place at the side of the fire, and that she was quickly besieged by a number of clamorous postulants, whose wants she seemed but poorly adequate to supply.

At a glance he perceived that the house contained a master and a mistress; but an old lady in the chimney corner, having by her a pair of crutches, made him quail, by the sinister expression of her countenance. Still, nothing daunted, he asked the master of the house at once for employment.

"Plenty of employment have I, friend, and good wages," answered he, "but I am a man of a thousand: and I may also say, not one man of a thousand will stop with me in this house."

"And may I ask the reason of this, sir?" said Mihal, taking off his hat respectfully.

"I will answer you immediately; but first follow me into my garden. There," said he, pointing to a heap of bones which lay bleaching on the ground, "*they* are the bones of those unfortunate persons who have followed in my service; if now, therefore, you should so wish, you have my full permission to depart unhurt: if you will brave them, hear now the terms on which I must be served."

"Sir," answered Mihal, "you surprise me. I have travelled far, have no money, neither any more to eat; say, therefore, your terms; and if I can at all reconcile myself to them, I am prepared to stop here."

"You must understand, then," said the farmer, "that I hold my lands by a very unusual tenure. This is not my fault. However, you will find me an indulgent master to you, at all events; for, in fact, you may chance to be my master as much as I yours, or perhaps more; for *these* are the terms:—

"If I, at any time, first find fault with any one thing *you* may say or do, *you* are to be solemnly bound to take this (pointing to an immense and sharp axe), and forthwith, without a word, strike me till I shall be dead: but should *you*, at any one time, first find fault with one of *my* words or actions, I must be equally bound to do the very same dreadful thing to *yourself*. Blame me not, therefore, should you find fault with me, for it will be my destiny, nay, my duty, to do as I have described; and, on the contrary, if it happen *otherwise*, I must be ready to submit to my fate. Consider, and reply."

"O, my master!" said Mihal More, "I have but the alternative of starvation; I am in a strangely wild country, without a friend. I *must* die, if I proceed, and nothing more

dreadful than death can happen to me here. I therefore throw myself on your compassion, and agree to your terms."

They then returned to the house, and Mihal felt somewhat refreshed, even by the smell alone of the savoury viands which the mistress was then preparing for the afternoon's repast; the greyhound, too, cast occasionally wistful glances towards the operations going forward.

At length the dinner hour being all but arrived, the old lady in the chimney-corner then opened her lips for the first time since Mihal had come in, and expressed a wish to go out and take a walk; "for," said she, "I have not been out for some weeks, ever since our last servant left us. What is your name, my man?" So he told her. "Come out, then," said she, "Mihal, and assist me about the garden, for I am completely cramped."

Mihal muttered a few words about dinner, hunger, and so on, but was interrupted by the farmer, who said, "Mihal, you must attend my mother; she has sometimes strange fancies. Besides, remember our agreement. *Do you find fault with me?*"

"O, by no means, sir," said Mihal, frightened; "I must do my business, I suppose."

The dinner was actually laid out on the plates to every one when Mihal and the old lady walked out. No sooner had they done so, than the greyhound, before she could be prevented, pounced on his dinner, and devoured it in a moment!

The old lady thought proper to walk for some hours in the garden; and now was Mihal very hungry, for he had tasted nothing since he had finished the hen early that morning; he almost began to wish that he had relieved the greyhound.

When they came in at last, the supper was being prepared. Mihal was now quite certain that his wants would be attended to; but how woefully was he doomed to be disappointed! For, no sooner had they entered the house than the accursed old lady seized a large cake of wheaten bread, which was baking on the embers, and, hastily spreading on it a coat of butter, directed Mihal to attend her again into the garden! He could say nothing, for his master's eyes were on him. He was completely bewildered. In despair he went with the old lady, and as it was a lovely moonlight night, she stopped out an unusual time, and it was very late when they came in.

Mihal stretched himself, quite fainting, on the bed, but slept not a wink. How I wish, now, thought he, that I had given the greyhound not only the small bones, but even half my hen!

The next morning the family early assembled for breakfast, and again were the cakes put down to bake over the glowing fire. Again did the old lady seize one, and command Mihal into the garden!

He was now completely exhausted; and, determining to expostulate with his master when he came in, went up to him, craving some food.

"No," said the farmer; "we never eat except at stated times, my mother keeps the keys."

"Ah, sir, have pity on me!" answered Mihal; "how can I exist, or do your business?"

"*And can you blame me?*" said the master.

Mihal, now quite losing sight of the agreement, and confused by the question, put in so treacherous a manner, answered, "that of course he could not but blame any person who would permit such infamous conduct."

Here was the signal. Mihal, in his enfeebled state, was no match for the sturdy farmer; in a moment his head was rolling on the floor by a vigorous stroke of the fatal axe, while grins of satisfaction might be seen playing on the countenances both of the old lady, and her greyhound!

The feelings of the poor widow may be imagined, when no tidings ever reached her of her Mihal More. But, on the expiration of a year, the second son, Pauthrick Dhuv, or Patrick Black Fellow, so called from his dark complexion, also prevailed on his mother to let him go in search of his brother, and of employment.

But why should I describe again the horrid scene? Let me satisfy you by merely saying that precisely the same occurrences also happened to poor Pauthrick Dhuv, and that his bones were added to those of his brother, and of the other victims behind the farmer's garden!

But when, in the course of another year, neither Mihal nor Pauthrick appeared, the widow's grief was unbounded. How was she, then, astonished, when "the fool," as he was yet always called, although his real name was Rooshkulum, actually volunteered to do the same! Nothing could stop

him: go he would. So the cake was baked, the hen was killed and roasted, and Rooshkulum, "the fool," set out on his expedition. And there, at the rock in the wood, was that very same greyhound; and as soon as she had looked him in the face, he said, "Why, poor thing! I have here what I cannot eat, and you seem badly to need it; here are these bones and some of this cake."

It was then the greyhound addressed him. "Come with me," said she; "lo! here is the well, of which *your two brothers* could not drink: behold! here is the honey on the top, clear and pure, but the blood is far beneath!"

When "the fool" had satisfied himself at this well, he followed the greyhound to the farmer's house. It may be barely possible that by the road he received from her some excellent advice.

The conversation that ensued when Rooshkulum arrived at the farmer's, and offered himself for his servant, was much of the same nature as I have before detailed while relating the former part of my story. "But," said Rooshkulum the fool, "I will not bind myself to these terms for ever; I might get tired of you, or you of me; so, if you please, I will agree to stop with you for certain till we both hear the cuckoo cry when we are together."

To this they agreed, and went into the house. However, just before they stepped in, the farmer asked Rooshkulum his name.

"Why," said he, "mine is a very curious name: it is so curious a name, indeed, that you would never learn it; and where is the occasion of breaking your jaws every minute trying to call me 'Pondraealeuthashochun,' which is my real name, when you may as well call me always 'the Boy?'"

"Well! that will do," answered the master.

The dinner was now prepared, and laid out on the plates, and the old tricks about to be played. Rooshkulum, as with the others, could not find fault, for, fool as he was, he knew the consequences. As he went out with the old lady, she too inquired his name.

"Why, really," said he to her, "mine is a name that no one, I venture to say, was ever called before. All my brothers and sisters died, and my father and mother thought that perhaps an unusual queer kind of name might have luck, so they called me 'Mehane.'"

And, reader, if thou understandest not our vernacular, know that "Mehane" signifies in English "myself."

They spent some hours, as usual, in the garden, and Rooshkulum returned tired and exhausted. But when he expected to get his supper, and when she again brought him out, and ate the fine hot buttered cake before his very eyes, it was more than flesh and blood could stand. However, he pretended not to mind it in the least, but was very civil to the old lady, amusing her by his silly stories. "And now, ma'am," said he, "let's walk a little way down this sunny bank before we go in."

Certain it was that the sun did happen to shine on the bank at that very time, but it was to what were *growing* on it that he wished to direct her close attention; for when he came to a certain place where there was a cavity filled by a rank growth of nettles, thistles, and thorns, he gave his charge such a shove as sent her sprawling and kicking in the midst of them, uttering wild shrieks, for the pain was great.

But Rooshkulum had no notion of helping her out, and ran into the house, which was some distance away, desiring the farmer to run, for that his mother *would* walk there, and had fallen into a hole, from which he could not get her out. And then the farmer ran, and cried, "O, mother, where are you? what has happened?"

"Alas, my son! here I am down in this hole! Help me out! I am ruined, disfigured for life!"

"And who is it," said the farmer, "that has dared to serve you thus?"

"O," said she, "it was Mehane! *Mehane a veil Mehane!*" (Myself has ruined myself!)

"Who?" said the farmer, as he helped her out.

"O, it was Mehane," answered she; "*Mehane a veil Mehane!*"

"Well, then," said the farmer, "I suppose it can't be helped, as it was yourself that did it. So here, 'Boy!' take her on your back, and carry her home; it was but an accident!"

So Rooshkulum carried her off and put her to bed, she all the time crying out, "Ah! but it was *Myself* that ruined *Myself*!" till her son thought her half cracked. She was quite unable to rise next morning; so Rooshkulum "the fool" made

an excellent and hearty breakfast, which he took care also to share with the greyhound.

But then the old lady called her son to her bedside, and explained how that it was "the Boy" who had done the mischief, "and I command you," said she, "to get rid of him, and for that purpose desire him at once to go and make 'cuissesh na cuissesh na guirach' (the road of the sheep's feet), that you have long been intending to do, and then to send him with the flock over the road to the land of the giant; we shall then never see him more; and it is better to lose even a flock of sheep than have him longer here, now that he has discovered our trick."

The farmer called Rooshkulum to him, and taxed him with what he had done to his mother.

"And," said Rooshkulum, "*could you blame me?*"

"Why, no," answered the farmer, remembering his part of the agreement, "*I don't blame you*, but you must never do it any more. And now you must take these (pointing to the sheep), and because the bog is soft on the road to the 'land of the giant,' you must make 'the road of the sheep's feet' for them to go over, and come back when they are fat, and the giant will support you while you are there. *Do you blame me for that?*"

"No," said Rooshkulum, driving away the sheep.

But, contrary to all their expectations, in an hour's time in marched Rooshkulum, covered with bog dirt and blood. "O!" said he, "I have had hard work since; and made a good deal of the road of the sheep's legs; but, indeed, there are not half enough legs after all, and you must give me more legs, if you would wish the road made firm."

"And, you rascal, do you tell me you have cut off the legs of all my fine sheep?"

"Every one, sir; did you not desire me? *Do you blame me?*"

"O dear no! by no means! Only take care, and don't do it any more."

They went on tolerably for a few days, for they were afraid of Rooshkulum, and let him alone, till one morning the farmer told him he was going to a wedding that night, and that he might go with him.

"Well," said Rooshkulum, "what is a wedding? what will they do there?"

"Why," answered the farmer, "a wedding is a fine place, where there is a good supper, and two people are joined together as man and wife."

"O, is that it? I should like much to see what they'll do."

"Well, then, you must promise me to do what I'll tell you with the horses when we are going."

"Why, what shall I do?"

"O, only when we are going, *don't take your eyes from the horses* till we get there; then have your *two eyes* on my plate, and *an eye* on every other person's plate; and then you'll see what they'll do."

Rooshkulum said nothing. They went to the wedding; but when they sat down to supper, all were surprised to find a round thing on their plates, covered with blood, and not looking very tempting. But the farmer soon guessed the sad truth, and calling Rooshkulum aside, he sternly asked him what he had done.

"*Can you blame me?*" answered the provoking Rooshkulum; "did you not desire me not to take the eyes from the horses till I got here, and to put them on the plates, and two on your own plate, and that I would see what they would do then?"

"O, *don't imagine I blame you*," said the farmer; "but I meant your own eyes all the time; and, mind me, *don't do it any more!*"

They were all by this time heartily sick of Rooshkulum, especially the old lady, who had never left her bed; and one morning, feeling something better, she called the farmer to her bedside, and addressed him thus:—"You know, my son, that your agreement with that rascal will terminate when you both shall hear the cuckoo. Now, in my youth I could imitate the cuckoo so well that I have had them flying round me. Put me up, therefore, in the big holly bush; take him along with you to cut a tree near; I will then cry 'cuckoo!' 'cuckoo!' and the agreement will be broken!" said she, chuckling to herself.

This seemed a capital idea; so the farmer lifted his mother out of bed, and put her up into the holly bush, calling Rooshkulum to bring the big axe, for that he intended to fell a tree. Rooshkulum did as he was desired, and commenced cutting down a certain tree, which the farmer pointed out. And not

long had he been thus engaged when the old lady in the holly bush cried out "cuckoo!" "cuckoo!" "Hah! what's that?" said the farmer; "that sounds like the cuckoo!"

"O, that cannot be," said Rooshkulum, "for this is winter!"

But now the cuckoo was heard, beyond a doubt.

"Well," said Rooshkulum, "before I've done with you, I'll go and see this cuckoo."

"Why, you stupid fool!" said the farmer, "no man ever saw the cuckoo."

"Never mind!" said Rooshkulum, "it can be no harm to look. Wouldn't you think, now, that the cuckoo was speaking out of the holly bush?"

"O, not at all!—perhaps she is five miles away. Come away at once and give up your place. Did not we both hear her?"

"Stop!" said Rooshkulum; "stay back! don't make a noise! There! did not you see something moving? Ay! **THAT** must be the cuckoo!"

So saying, he hurled the axe up into the holly bush with his whole force, cutting away the branches, scattering the leaves and berries, and with one blow severing the head from the shoulders of the farmer's mother!

"O!" said the farmer, "my poor old mother! O! what have you done, you villain! You have murdered my mother!"

"And," said Rooshkulum (seemingly surprised), "*I suppose you BLAME me for this, do you?*"

And now was the farmer taken by surprise, and in the heat of his passion answered, "How dare you, you black-hearted villain, ask me such a question? Of course I do! Have you not murdered my mother? Alas! my poor old mother."

"O, very well!" said Rooshkulum, as the farmer continued looking at his mother, and lamenting, "perhaps you also remember our own little agreement. I have but too good reason to think that you and your accursed old mother, by your schemes, caused the death of my two fine brothers. But now for the fulfilment of my share of the bargain!"

In a moment the axe descended on his head; and Rooshkulum, *the wise simpleton*, having now got rid of his enemies, took possession of all the farmer's property, returned home for his mother, and lived free from care or further sorrow for the remainder of his happy life; but he never forgot the services of the greyhound, and never allowed her to want.

And here let us conclude our legend, by observing, by way of moral, "Be ever charitable to the distressed, whether of the brute or human kind, for you know not but that they also may belong to the ranks of 'the good people!'"

AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION FOR THE WORKING CLASSES.

THAT agricultural improvement is extending with very rapid strides in many parts of Ireland, is evident to all who have had an opportunity of observing the country; the best proof of which is, perhaps, that our agricultural exports have been greatly increased for some years past, whilst during the same period the population has been augmented to a degree unprecedented in any of the *old* countries of the world. That our exporting food to such an extent is a proof of the wealth or happiness of those who produce it, may well admit of doubt, otherwise the miserable serfs of Russia, Poland, and other corn-growing countries, would be entitled to rank higher in the scale of happiness than the English farmers, who are not able to raise sufficient food for their own country! But notwithstanding the pleasing proofs of improvements in farming which meet the eye of the tourist in various parts of the country, and particularly in the north, he will in too many places find it difficult to imagine anything worse either in the farms, the habitations, the cattle, or the implements, even should he extend the retrospect to a period ever so remote.

Agricultural schools, with even a single acre of land attached, and worked by the elder boys on a system of rotation adapted to the ground and to the district in which it happened to be situated, would soon effect a wonderful reformation in the farming of the country. That such would be the happy result, is self-evident; and we are strengthened in our conviction by having witnessed in very many instances the good effect of the agricultural education imparted at Templemoyle, in the county of Londonderry. Entertaining these views, we need hardly say how much we were gratified by a visit to one of these schools a short time since, situated in a remote and se-